

## **ORGANIC COTTON: PRODUCTION TRENDS IN THE U.S. AND GLOBALLY**

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### **Abstract**

U.S. farmers planted an estimated 16,473 acres of organic cotton (certified and transitional) in the U.S. in 1999.

1999's planting represents a 75 percent increase in organic cotton acreage over 1998. Further, farmers planted organic cotton in an additional 2 states from 1998. As a result, organic cotton is now grown in 40 percent of the 17 states where conventional cotton is grown. (USDA/NASS 1998)

While the U.S. dominates global organic cotton production, growing approximately one-third of all organic cotton in 1997, acreage is increasing overseas, particularly in Greece, Peru and Turkey, mostly due to lower costs of production. (Agricola Partners 1997)

International interest in U.S. cotton will likely bring about a slight increase in U.S. acreage in 2000. Greater promotional assistance from cotton associations would help ensure a place for U.S. growers in the international marketplace.

### **Introduction**

Organic cotton is cotton grown without the use of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers and is certified by an independent organization that the grower meets or exceeds defined organic standards. Farmers in the U.S. have been growing organic cotton since at least 1990.

### **Methods/Results**

In the spring of 1999, I surveyed U.S. organic cotton growers, certification agencies and state inspectors to determine the number of acres of organic cotton planted in 1999 and compared the figures to a similar review I undertook in 1998.

The states growing the 16,473 acres of organic cotton were (in order of acreage): Texas (8,600 acres), 2) New Mexico (3,550 acres), 3) California (1,083 acres), 4) Arkansas (1,000 acres), 5) Arizona (930 acres), 6) Missouri (650 acres), and 7) Tennessee (600 acres).

Harvest figures for 1999 were unavailable for all states at this time.

### **Discussion**

1999's increased acreage indicates a potential return to the high point of 1995 when U.S. farmers grew an estimated 25,000 acres of organic cotton. At that time, only a few large companies used organic cotton. When they withdrew from the market citing supply problems, higher production costs, and marketing barriers in the textile and apparel industry, production plummeted to 9,050 acres. (Agricola Partners 1997)

Since then, a far wider breadth of manufacturers has become involved and production has increased in response. In some cases, the manufacturers use 100% organic cotton and in other cases blend a lesser amount (usually 3%) of organic cotton with conventional cotton. Companies are making the cotton into a variety of products, from personal care to bedding, furniture, upholstery, clothing and towels. Mills in the South are responding to the resurgence in interest, implementing organic cotton spinning and weaving programs to fill the market niche. Mills overseas are implementing similar programs.

While current organic cotton acreage represents less than 0.1% of all cotton grown in the U.S., the acreage is likely to grow substantially, much as the organic food acreage has grown in the last few years. Virtually all manufacturers in our 140-member council plan to maintain, if not increase their use of organic cotton in 2000.

### **Summary**

The increase in the number of acres and the number of states involved in the production of organically grown cotton reflects an increased interest in organic cotton on the part of both consumers and manufacturers as well as an interest on the part of growers to obtain more viable prices for their crops. It is likely that organic cotton is in the same position as organic vegetables were approximately 15 years ago.

### **References**

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Figure 1. Projected U.S. Organic Cotton Acreage: 1999 (Certified and Transitional)

STATE	PLANTED ACRES	1999 vs. 1998
Arizona	930 acres	increased 8 percent
Arkansas	1,000 acres	no production in 1998
California	1,083 acres	decreased 15 percent
Missouri	650 acres	increased 44 percent
New Mexico	3,550 acres	increased 589 percent
Tennessee	600 acres	no production in 1998
Texas	8,660 acres	increased 37 percent

**TOTAL** 16,473 acres of organic cotton planted, a 75 percent increase over 1998 planting estimate of 9,368 acres.

Figure 2. U.S. Organic Cotton Acreage, 1990-1998

1990	900
1991	3,290
1992	6,305
1993	12,402
1994	15,856
1995	24,625
1996	10,778
1997	9,050
1998	9,368
1999	16,4